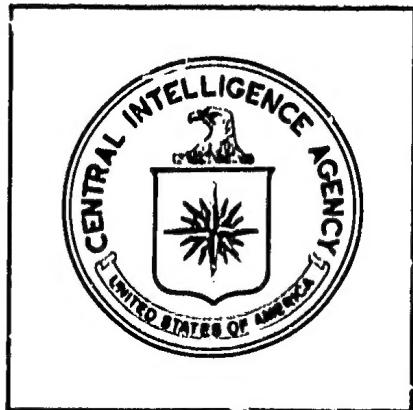


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CIA-RDP86T00608R00040005

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Middle East-Africa-South Asia

STAFF NOTES

State Dept. review completed

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SECRETSyria*Communists Tightly Controlled*

Erroneous Egyptian press reports last week that Damascus had begun a massive round-up of Syrian Communists may have been aimed, as the Syrians claim, at embarrassing the Asad government during the visit of Saudi King Khalid. The story, however, has brought to light some heretofore unknown friction between the ruling Baath party and its junior partner, the Syrian Communist party.

As a part of the National Progressive Front, an umbrella organization encompassing all of the legally recognized parties in Syria, the Syrian Communist party is ostensibly a member of the governing coalition. The Communists, however, have very little influence on policy. Their activities are highly restricted and party secretary general Khalid Bakdash is permitted to operate only under tightly controlled conditions.

The party usually echoes the position of the Asad government, a line set by Moscow. Recently, however, some officials of the Syrian Communist party have gotten into trouble with the Damascus regime for making public statements while traveling abroad that were at variance with the official Syrian line. As a result, Damascus has slapped an indefinite travel ban on perhaps as many as 450 Communist party members.

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[redacted]

the Asad government is also angry at Bakdash for trying to undermine a Syrian-American offshore oil exploration agreement and for pressing for a Syrian-Iraqi reconciliation. In addition, a Syrian cabinet minister claims that Baath party deputy secretary general al-Ahmar recently took a Communist party official to task privately because of Communist attempts to expand their influence in military and university circles, areas the Baath party considers its private preserves.

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Because of the Soviets' carefully nurtured efforts to stay on good terms with President Asad, it is unlikely that the present friction between Syrian Communists and Baathists is a reflection of differences between Moscow and Damascus. Present tensions appear instead to result from the Syrian Communists' frustrations because of the constraints placed on their activities and from the Baathists' sensitivity to any effort by the Communists to expand their influence or take issue with government policy.

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~~SECRET~~Pakistan*Government Acts to Oust Opposition Legislators*

The government's action last week in moving to disqualify members of the proscribed National Awami Party (NAP) from sitting in either the national or provincial assemblies will further embitter the weak and divided opposition to the Bhutto regime. However, there appears to be little the frustrated opposition can do effectively to protest this latest government step.

A presidential ordinance, issued on December 23, amended the political parties act to provide for disqualification of any office-holder of a party dissolved under the act from membership in the national or provincial assemblies. The office holders are also prohibited by the ordinance from contesting future elections for a period of five years. Political observers in Islamabad had been anticipating the move following a Supreme Court decision on October 30 that confirmed the government's action last February in banning the NAP as a party unreconciled to the existence of Pakistan.

All of some 37 NAP members of the Senate, the National Assembly, and the provincial assemblies in the Northwest Frontier and Baluchistan provinces apparently will be affected, since all were considered ex-officio office-bearers of the NAP under its bylaws. The NAP was the largest party in the two provinces although it had little following in Pakistan's other two provinces, the Punjab and the Sind.

Following the Supreme Court's decision last fall, many of the NAP legislators joined the newly-created National Democratic Party (NDP). Government spokesmen have termed the NDP merely a cover for the old NAP and it appears unlikely the NAP office holders who have adhered to the new party will escape being expelled from their legislative seats.

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The removal of such a large number of national and provincial assembly members could force the holding within the next two months of numerous by-elections. Alternatively, Prime Minister Bhutto may choose this time to carry out nationwide general elections--slated to be held no later than the spring of 1977. The governing Pakistan Peoples Party, despite recent defections in the Punjab, appears in a position to add through elections to its already overwhelming strength in the National Assembly and to improve its position in the various provincial bodies. The opposition's inability to mount a serious challenge to the government was again demonstrated in the populous Punjab on December 19 when its widely heralded "Black Day" of protest against government repression resulted in only a few minor demonstrations and attracted little public attention.

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China-India*Dialogue of the Deaf*

In the last few months, India has taken the initiative in the long inconclusive dialogue with Peking designed to lead to the normalization of relations. This is a turnaround from the exchanges of last year and early this year, when the Chinese took the lead. The results, however, have been no different--there has been no real progress. Indeed, Peking appears distinctly uninterested in resuming discussions for the time being, although the Chinese have been careful not to close the door on negotiations for some future time.

According to the Indian foreign secretary, the Indian feelers were initiated in August. The foreign secretary said that he called in the Chinese chargé in New Delhi and favorably reviewed past Chinese statements relating to normalization. The Indian observed that the two countries should try and build on this and asked the chargé how this might be accomplished. The foreign secretary said that he got no substantive reply.

Although this is our first knowledge of the alleged Indian demarche, it is consistent with a pattern of Indian intentions toward China since September, when a movement to prepare Indian public opinion for some type of movement in Sino-Indian relations may have begun. A ministry of external affairs document was circulated then that listed Indian steps toward improving relations with China and claimed that New Delhi was exercising restraint in its propaganda regarding Peking. Moreover, the defense minister (who has since been dropped from the cabinet) made a strong case, in an off-the-record address at the Defense Services Club, that the time had come to normalize relations with Peking.

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Prime Minister Gandhi transmitted a bid to improve relations with Peking through Yugoslav Premier Bijedic, whom she met before and after his early October trip to China. Gandhi went public in October in an interview with the central news service, saying India's policy toward China was to improve relations even though there were differences between the two countries, but the Chinese had not responded to Indian efforts. Gandhi made those remarks shortly after a border clash in which four Indian soldiers were killed. Both sides played down the incident, and it does not seem to have altered the state of relations.

The Indian position has not been as unambiguous as their diplomats would make it seem. Gandhi, for example, coupled her overtures to Peking with some stiff language. In an interview with the *London Sunday Telegraph* that was broadcast by New Delhi domestic radio on October 12, she accused Peking of instigating Indians along the border to make trouble, supplying them with arms and books, and training guerrillas. Moreover, in the one instance where outside corroboration exists--the Yugoslav case--Gandhi did not give Bijedic an actual message for Peking. Rather, she reviewed the current state of Sino-Indian relations in such a way that she reportedly gave Bijedic the impression that he was to transmit New Delhi's interest in normalization to the Chinese.

Individually, New Delhi's feelers may have seemed lukewarm to Peking. But taken in toto, the signals were clear enough, and it was Peking that was uninterested in picking up the thread. The Chinese may have calculated that Gandhi is not serious, given Delhi's continued ties with Moscow and what the Chinese saw as deliberate stalling in the face of unmistakable Chinese overtures in early 1975. Peking might also believe that a Chinese-Indian dialogue would have a negative impact on the hard-pressed regime in Bangladesh. If this is Peking's concern, it presumably will defer a response to New Delhi until Dacca increases its internal control and the danger of Indian intervention further recedes.

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There is another possible factor in China's current disinterest--the contempt that China's de facto premier holds for India. In an early December conversation with the departing USLO chief, ranking vice-premier Teng Hsiao-ping dismissed India as a country where "cows are more important than state sovereignty." While it is in Peking's long term interest to normalize relations with New Delhi, Teng at least is probably in no hurry.

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